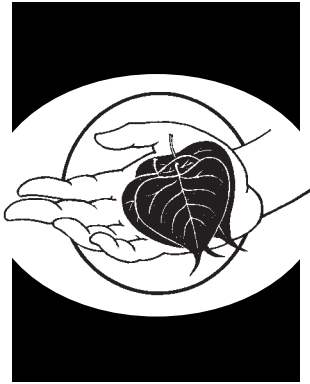


SANGHAPALA FOUNDATION

# ABHAYAGIRI MONASTERY

16201 TOMKI ROAD  
REDWOOD VALLEY CA 95470



FALL 2000

## FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

NEWSLETTER

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April 13-22, 2001  
**Spring Retreat**  
(See back cover)

### 2001 Events

WITH AJAHN

SUMEDHO

April 13-23

#### MEDITATION RETREAT

WITH AJAHN AMARO & AJAHN SUNDARA

at Spirit Rock Center, Woodacre, California

Call Spirit Rock for info or to register:

(415) 488-0164 ext. 393 (after 12/1/00)

Spaces assigned by lottery. Waiting list expected.

May 6, 1:00 P.M.

#### DHAMMA TALK

at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas

Talmage, California (Mendocino County)



*New Dhamma publications  
from Abhayagiri Monastery*

### Words of Calm & Friendship

*by Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro*

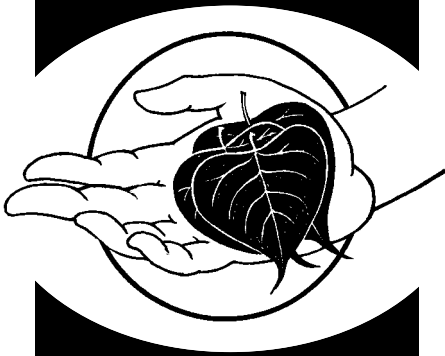
This 24-page booklet contains the Dhamma talks: "Meditations on the Breath" and "Spiritual Friendship."

### Dhamma and the Real World

*by Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro*

This 40-page booklet contains popular articles from *Fearless Mountain* newsletter, including: "What Does a Buddhist Monastic Know about Real Life, Anyway?" "Laying the Foundation for Social Action," "Everyone Learns Together: Youth, Families, and the Dhamma," and "Preparing for Death: The Final Days of Death Row Inmate Jaturun 'Jay' Siripongs."

*For free copies, contact Abhayagiri.*



# FEARLESS MOUNTAIN

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## What Does a Buddhist Monastic Know about Real Life, Anyway?

by *Ajahn Amaro*

**W**e are often asked, “What does a Buddhist monastic know about real life?” This is a very good question because many people may think that we don’t have to deal with real life in the monastery: “Things are easy for you, but outside the monastery wall we have to deal with real life; we have a much more difficult job.” Their impression is that once you have given yourself to the holy life, then you float around on little purple clouds, existing in exquisite mutual harmony at all times, exuding undifferentiated love and compassion for each other, and, finally, at the end of a life of ever-increasing blissfulness and profound insights into the nature of ultimate reality, deliquescing softly into nirvana leaving behind a soft chime of ringing bells and a rainbow. Not so. I’ll get on to that in a minute. I’m joking a bit, but this is the kind of image that people may have of monasteries. It’s another world, something that other people do.

The Buddha was asked a lot of questions in his time, and he once said there are four ways to respond to a question. The first way is to give a straight answer. The second is to ask a counter question. The third is to rephrase the question. The fourth is to



Illustration by Abhinano Bhikkhu

remain silent. As I look at the question at hand, what comes to mind are two counter questions: What is a Buddhist monastic? And what is real life?

Most people probably don’t know all that much about how the monastic system actually functions in the Buddhist world. To many, Buddhist monks are simply people who magically appear and disappear, like wandering teachers or circuit preachers. There’s not really a cognizance of what a monastery is, how it functions, or where a Buddhist monastic comes from. Even the word “monastery,” like the word “morality,” often has a certain emotional effect.

(continued on page 4)

# FROM THE MONASTERY

As I write, the first rains of autumn have settled the ubiquitous dust of Mendocino, and the sweet, acrid scent of October grapes perfumes the air. The nights are cool; and those sizzling, sarong-clad summer afternoons have already faded in memory. Such contemplations as “Where did I put my gloves?” and “I’m sure we had more gas bottles around here somewhere . . .” are heard around the place, and heat-escape is replaced by rain-protection as the impinging physical concern. Rapid changes. So, too, the landscape around the central area; the last rain it welcomed fell on bare concrete pads, stalks of naked rebar and open trenches laced with pipes and wires. Now the bathhouse gleams, the Dhamma Hall has spread its freshly-fledged wings, the piles of builders’ scrap have gone, and “our own private Kansas,” a 40’ by 60’ flat garden area, has been opened up between the Hall and the leaning oak.

## COMMUNITY

Over the last few months the face of the Abhayagiri monastic community has also changed somewhat. We said farewell to Tan Kongrit, our ever-smiling electronics whiz, who had to return to Thailand because of visa and passport restrictions. He hopes to come back to Abhayagiri for a longer stay next year, having found the American environment very suited to his training. Tan Karunadhammo, the trailblazer as our first anagarika, novice and bhikkhu, left for a year’s stay in England on an “exchange program” swap with Tan Thanuttaro. It is planned that he will return to Abhayagiri when Ajahn Sumedho comes in April to lead a ten-day retreat at Spirit Rock.

Anagarikas Larry and Scott both left the robes before the Rains Retreat, as was mentioned in the last newsletter, however Larry has not moved far away—just a mile or two down Tomki Road, where he is sharing a house with several other of Abhayagiri’s lay friends. He has also assumed the responsibilities of treasurer for the Sanghapala Foundation—the steward organization for the monastery—taking over from Soo-Hi Nayer, who served this function with great commitment and diligence for the last three years. We have all been very grateful for Soo-Hi’s quiet and thorough competence in caring for the arcane world of “The Books” and wish Larry the best in his efforts there, too. Scott Swinney has already made his way to Burma, and reports have it that he has been ordained and now goes by the name of Samanera Ñanaloka; he is practicing at the Chanmyay Yeiktha monastery in Rangoon. We wish him all the very best in his efforts in the holy life.

In addition to these losses, Tan Sudanto, who has been with us here for the last two and a half years, is planning to return to Thailand in mid-November. He originally came to spend time at Abhayagiri, a bit closer to his family, after sev-

eral years of training in Thailand. After his father passed away a year ago, however, he stayed on to help with the establishment of the monastery. He has been both of immense practical help—particularly with building design work, guestmastering and computer troubleshooting—as well as contributing greatly to the community with his goodheartedness and creative initiatives for skillful communication. He intends to go to Wat Pah Nanachat, the monastery for foreign monks established by Ajahn Chah, and to stay with his former teacher, Ajahn Ganha, a highly esteemed forest monk of Prae Province in Northeast Thailand. He, too, we wish well for his continuing journey.

Along with the currents carrying folks away, the tides have also been bringing some in. We welcomed Tan Thanuttaro from England at the beginning of the Rains, as we did also Robert Hohn. Happily married and working as a high school teacher, Robert had been thinking for a long time about the possibility of making a year’s commitment to intensified spiritual training. All the necessary conditions finally fell into place this year, and, taking a leave of absence from his family and his school (earning a few lines on his adventure in the local paper in the bargain), he arrived at Abhayagiri in July and took the Eight Precepts in August. His wife Pietr drove over from the Sierras for the ceremony and is also taking this year as a time for intensified meditation practice. In a similar vein, we have welcomed Brian Voegtlen into the community for a three-month stay, he too having taken leave from his wife and regular employment for this time.

Intent on helping with the construction of monastic housing this summer, Rick Williams—one of the directors of the Sanghapala Foundation—came in the early summer and has been working most of the daylight hours since then to achieve this goal. Known now as “Mr. Adaptable” for the ease with which he would be asked to start projects one place and then be shifted to another, he has been an instrumental and driving force behind our getting at least three new, up-to-code living spaces established this year. Sadly, his eighty-six-year-old mother fell seriously ill in October, so he left to help take care of her. If her condition stabilizes again, he hopes to return to help us out with the support of the winter retreat. We send all our good wishes for his mother’s well-being and our gratitude for the great kind-hearted energy that Rick has brought to us this year.

It has been a sadness that the restrictions placed on us by the County with regards to the number of people able to be in residence at any one time has caused us to turn away a few prospective candidates for anagarika life during the last year or so. Consequently, there have been few people entering the Sangha here with the intention of making a long-term commitment. During these last few weeks, however, we have welcomed several young people who have expressed interest, and

of Ten Thousand Buddhas in September. This was the first ordination to take place there since 1995, and several of the candidates had been waiting patiently to take the full Precepts since then. This occasion was also historic in the fact that Rev. Heng Sure, an elder American bhikshu and the director of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, was invited by his community to act as Preceptor—a role taken previously only by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua himself.

The annual rhythm of retreats and teachings has rolled along with Ajahn Pasanno leading a much appreciated weekend workshop on Dependent Origination in Portland, Oregon, also giving many other teachings there—both at Friends of the Dhamma and other venues. He also led a day-long at Three Jewels Dharma Hall in Fort Bragg and attended the Monday night group in Caspar. I helped conduct the Family Retreat at Spirit Rock (although I still feel that a name more like “Family Dharma Jam” or “Summer Camp” would fit the actuality of the event a lot better). It was a glorious and multifaceted blending of talents, teachings, and energies—by humans of all sizes—with the result that the skillful flow of the programs and the expanding kindness left us all with an “*après goût de bonheur*,” that aftertaste of goodness which is one of the pure joys of this realm of living beings.

As was mentioned above we welcomed several groups to Abhayagiri during the summer, the first of these being the Spirit Rock teens over the Labor Day weekend. The fifth such visit, this weekend has become its own little institution with several of the adult helpers as well as the teens, let alone the monks, being present year after year. It was a more rounded session this year with time set aside for formal meditation instruction and Dhamma discussions as well as the outdoor work period and “solo” hours in the forest during the afternoon.

In the closing circle one of the members of the group (a twelve-year-old live wire charged at about a hundred kilowatts) chimed in at the end, after he and everyone else had already spoken, quietly saying: “What I rilly wanted to say was that up until now my life—with my books, my girlfriend, TV, computers, and so on—has been rilly boring. [And this from a kid who talked more than I do and was interested in at least twice as many things]. After this weekend . . . now my life is rilly interesting.” The room went still as the sincerity and import of this sank in.

As in previous years the members of the resident community at Abhayagiri each took two-week periods during the Rains to go on individual retreat. During these times one is liberated from the usual obligations of community life and can set up whatever routine one chooses for the fortnight. Some people also choose to fast during that time so that, in many ways, there is no need to engage with the contingencies of night and day and the monastery schedule. It is a rare and much-appreciated opportunity, although, of course, two weeks

alone with your mind can be heaven, hell, or the *bardos* of mediocrity depending fully on the karma we inherit and that which we create in the present moment.

As for our other regular teaching venues, the gatherings in Berkeley on the first Tuesday of each month continue to be rich and fruitful evenings. The hall is often full and the levels of energy and attention very keen. Our annual long retreat—held this year over Halloween at Spirit Rock—has also roused a similar degree of enthusiasm, at least if the booking forms are anything to go by. Perhaps in the light of some of our emphases on *dana* over the last while, the Spirit Rock board and teachers’ circle agreed to let us run a retreat on a fee-less basis—i.e., that the retreatants would be charged no money at all, not even using “suggested donation” language, and that whatever came in by way of freewill offerings at the end of the retreat would be used to cover the expenses of the event. The Sanghapala Foundation, together with the Spirit Rock teachers and some of their board, have guaranteed to personally make up any shortfall if the freely offered funds coming in fail to meet the outlay. It is a great experiment—a leap of faith—and we hope that it will set a pattern that will be viable far into the future. And even if it doesn’t work out well this time, we feel so strongly about encouraging “an economy of gifts” that Sanghapala has resolved to sponsor a ten-day *dana* retreat every year regardless of profit or loss.

The last few items of news that are worthy of note are that Catherine Direen, formerly an *anagarika* at Abhayagiri in 1998 and friend of many in the wider community, has agreed to join the Sanghapala board. Her quiet presence and keen mind for business administration will be a valuable addition to the tending of the monastery’s affairs. In a similar vein, after having served on the Spirit Rock board for the last two years, I will be resigning [sic] my membership there after a final meeting in December. This seems an appropriate time to depart from this role as it comes at the end of my “go nowhere” year, and it is clear that, with the limitations of only being able to be in one place at a time, my presence and whole-hearted attention on Abhayagiri must be the priority in the future. It seems that the monastic input has been useful to Spirit Rock—particularly in informing the administration with the presence of a more classical Buddhist ethos—but, having offered my piece, it’s now time to move on. I will still be part of the teachers’ circle there but will return my administrative hat to the rack.

Finally, on October the third, after almost three years since we made the application, I was granted a Green Card by the U.S. Department of Justice. So, I am now a “legal alien” on these shores, and certain to find a scope for a Dhamma talk in that little phrase . . .

—Amaro Bhikkhu

# Monastics & Real Life

(continued from page 1)

Your blood starts to get cold, and you think, “That’s a place for other people, and there’s something about it I don’t really like.” I certainly had the same feeling at one time: You disappear behind a 20-foot-high wall into a life of scrubbing floors, freezing nights, and grim asceticism. That’s “the monastery.”

In many Buddhist countries—Tibet, Korea, China, and Japan—they did create a remote, enclosed, and self-sufficient model. However, in Southeast Asia, at least where Buddhism was not repressed by the various rulers, they sustained the original mendicant model that was established at the time of the Buddha. The monastery is actually like a cross between a church, commune, and community center. It’s not just a place where nuns and monks live; it’s everybody’s place. In Thailand, for example, there are about 50,000 monasteries.

Couldn’t you say  
a real life means  
simply having a  
body and mind?

Every village has a monastery; big villages have two or three. It’s like a synagogue or church with six rabbis or half a dozen ministers. One or two do most of the talking, and the others live, learn, and help out. It’s a commune of spiritual seekers, and it’s also a place where community life happens. Many village monasteries host the local town meetings or “county” fairs. The monastery is the heart of the community, not that place out on the hill that nobody ever enters.

Of course, there’s a degree of variety. Forest monasteries place an emphasis on meditation and tend to be outside of villages and a little further away. Those that are extremely popular will try to sustain a bit more quiet, with visiting hours at such and such a time. There might not be anyone to receive you. But generally speaking, most monasteries are open; they are everybody’s place.

At its heart, a monastery is sustained as a spiritual sanctuary. What creates a monastery is that everyone who comes through the gate undertakes to live by a certain standard, to conduct themselves in a certain way in terms of honesty, non-violence, modesty, restraint, and sobriety. Within that zone, it’s a safe place: no one is going to rob you, to chat you up, to try to sell you anything, to attack you, to lie to you, to be drunk. It’s an environment that maximizes the supportive conditions for helping you to cultivate kindness, wisdom, concentration—the whole range of wholesome spiritual qualities.

There are also teachers available. You might think that a great master like our teacher, Ajahn Chah, may have spent his life up in the mountains, meditating under a tree. He did that for a number of years, but once he opened a monastery, he

spent much of the next thirty years sitting under his hut receiving visitors from ten o’clock in the morning often until midnight. That’s the teacher’s job: the doctor is in. Not every monastery functions in that way, but it’s generally the job of certain members of monastic communities to be available to anyone who drops in. If you want to talk to the Ajahn, you don’t schedule a private interview, you just hang out until there’s an opportunity to ask your question.

In this respect, intrinsic to a Buddhist monastic life is the fact that you can be called upon to some degree or another to share with other people the wisdom and understanding you have developed. Whatever good is developed in the lives of the inhabitants of the monastery is made available. Of course, some people are not disposed to be teachers. Yet just aspiring to control your bad habits and get your mind a little bit clearer is in itself a great gift and a blessing to others. It’s a beautiful example.

So if this is a Buddhist monastic life, then what is real life? People often think real life means having a credit rating, a retirement plan, a job, a sex life, a house, a car, and a fixed pattern of living. But couldn’t you also say a real life means simply having a body and mind? Or a personality, a feeling of identity? For people who ask the question, the implication is that those who don’t have financial responsibilities, children, parents to look after, or marriage partners somehow experience a life that is intrinsically different. All the rough and tumble of the lay world is somehow intrinsically different. Seeing Buddhist monks or nuns on show—sitting in robes, statue-like and serene—it is easy to think, “They are not like me: they haven’t got sore knees like me; they haven’t got profane thoughts going through their minds like me; they haven’t got worries and anxieties, thoughts about the past and future all the time like me; they don’t have a difficult parent like me.” Well believe me, the monastery gate does not create any radical alteration of human nature as you pass through it. Come live in the monastery for one week, and then ask yourself where real life is.

From the Buddhist point of view, life is happening at the level of the senses, where sense consciousness impacts sights, sounds, smell, taste, touch, body, perceptions, feelings, ideas, and emotions. That’s where we experience life. Whether you are inside the monastery gate or outside it, the impact is the same. There’s a saying in Japan: “There’s many a shaven head surrounding a hairy mind.” When you enter the monastery gate, all your struggles with your parents don’t suddenly get switched off. All your sexual desires don’t suddenly fizzle out. All your feelings of self criticism don’t miraculously transform: “Now I am a monk. I like myself.”

In fact, the monastery is an optimum environment in which to experience real life. We get the raw experience of feeling sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch because all the normal distractions, mufflings, and mutings are absent. We can’t nibble or go to the fridge to help ourselves. Food has to be put

(continued from page 3)

The other most significant development this fall is the gradually approaching water line from our spring across the valley. With the sympathetic collaboration of our neighbor Joan Kostove, on whose land it lay, we have refurbished the springhead for the gushing source of sweet water, provided new tanks for her, and laid in 3,800 feet of pipe between the spring and our land. Our escalating difficulties with our own wells led us to consider reviving this supply and, with the skilful aid of our “water guys,” Skip Kenny and Dave Rupe, we will have both improved the supply to Joan’s house and steered an almost unimaginable six gallons a minute of the precious, pristine liquid to Abhayagiri. When all this comes together we will be able to breathe a sigh of relief, as we have been trucking water in for the last three months of the summer.

Over three separate weekends this summer we experimented with organizing extensive “working bees.” The first of these was during the annual visit of the teen program from Spirit Rock Center, and the second was associated with the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies, an organization based in the mid-peninsula and largely headed up by students of Gil Fronsdal. Their usual focus is a practice-based but more academic approach to the study of the scriptures and Buddhist tradition. For their visit we suggested, rather than focusing on the realm of words so much, a “monastic experience” workshop wherein the participants simply joined in the monastic routine, including the daily work periods. Like the teen weekend, it was largely a great success, and people set to with great vigor at the various tasks in hand. The final group was our own Upasikas joined by students from the Stanford University Buddhist community, who, like the Sati Center people, relinquished their customary diet of Sutta commentary by Ajahn Pasanno and myself for a day of hands-on activity.

We steered all three groups to a succession of related tasks, and, by the time we reached the end of the run, we had cleared an old logging road and opened up a significant trail between two prospective dwelling sites, including a splendid new bridge across a dividing creek; laid in another trail between one of those sites and the main trail running to the Cool Oaks at the heart of the forest; put in a walking meditation path; completely repainted the main house; and painted Ajahn Pasanno’s kuti, the laundry shed, the eaves of the double kuti, the straw-bale kuti and the sauna. And a splendid time was had by almost all.

It was quite a task to coordinate all the tools, materials and particular operations, as well as looking after all the accommodations, food and other refreshments. In this, the resident community—particularly Tan Acalo, Tan Jotipalo, Anagarika Robert, and Debbie—all gave generously and joyfully of their time. After the whirl of activity in these areas and

the great improvements made, those pathways and walls speak back with the voices of all the goodwill and heartfelt energy that went into creating them; they shine with the faces of all who lent their hands.

A lot has been accomplished this year, but it will still be nip and tuck to establish suitable dwelling places for the thirteen residents for the winter retreat, especially given that we had to relinquish all but one of our trailers to accord with the County requirements. It will be doable, given the generous use of some of the amenities of our friend and neighbor Mary Curran, and we are grateful to her and to the abundant financial offerings, particularly from Ruth Denison and the lay students of Ajahn Maha-Prasert of Wat Buddhanusorn in Fremont, California, which have helped us to complete all that has been done. The Kathina ceremony, which will be described below, was also a major source of funding to complete this year’s projects, and it will also help greatly in actualizing the plans in store for next year.

In addition to the many projects—both in progress and planned (see “Building Committee News,” page 13)—it is also possible, depending on the right conditions and the right folks showing up, to develop the little garden plan kindly drawn up for us by Jack Buktenica, for the newly open area behind the Dhamma Hall. It will require a small degree of earth-moving and some skill in planting trees and sculpting flower beds, the construction of an arbor and working with rocks and shrubs, to bring the area into the form that has been envisaged. Again, there is no particular urgency—it could easily wait another year or two—but the potential is there, and the ingredients are mostly gathered.

## EVENTS, TEACHINGS & OTHER PROJECTS

Freshest in the memory of all the season’s events is the Kathina festival held at Abhayagiri on October 15. The Kathina is an occasion designed to celebrate the communal harmony between the lay and monastic divisions of the four-fold assembly of the Buddha’s disciples. It principally revolves around the offering of cloth to the monastic community but has, over the centuries, expanded far beyond that. It is a time for the whole tribe to gather, to offer gifts and useful supplies for the monastery, and to enjoy the company of one’s *sahadhammikas*—fellow travellers on the Buddha’s Way. To some the ceremony is a familiar and time-honored ritual that connects them to everything they associate as good; to others some of the elements of the ceremony are mysterious or perplexing; but for all it is a time to rejoice in the power and beauty of generosity: how simple unselfishness is and how deeply it encapsulates the entire Dhamma teaching.

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# Bringing Practice into Daily Life

## Practice, Inc.

by *Jeanne Bendik*

During a discussion group at the New Year's retreat at Spirit Rock as the old millennium came to a close, retreatants were brainstorming ways that what we'd learned from intensive retreat practice might be carried back to "regular" life. One person commented that just within this group of ten to twelve people, we probably had many, many concrete suggestions that each individual could use when back home, at the office, or on the freeway. I've often felt the same wealth of experience when the Upasikas share practice-in-the-world tips at the end of a study day at Abhayagiri.

So here is a chance to exchange your favorite mindfulness tools, random acts of kindness, or daily Dhamma exercises. This article is intended to begin an experiment in collecting and sharing ideas for "incorporating" practice into daily life. I'm inviting suggestions from everyone: How do you awaken attention while at home? How you remember to pause and take those extra slow and deep breaths at a staff meeting? How do you remind yourself to notice "left-right, left-right" as your feet touch the ground when walking down the grocery store aisle. I'll be sharing your suggestions regularly in this newsletter.

Here are a few ideas to get things started:

### Reciting Gathas

An exercise I've tried from time to time was learned from Thich Nhat Hanh. His writing introduced me to the gatha, a short verse that is repeated whenever a certain action is done. The verse I've used most often brings a new appreciation and richness to kitchen clean up:

"Washing the dishes is like washing the baby Buddha.  
The profane is the sacred.  
Everyday mind is Buddha-mind."

Thich Nhat Hanh offers many other gathas for a variety of daily routines such as turning on a light, starting the

car, or using the telephone. He invites us to write our own gathas, too. Any ideas for mindful mouse-clicking or sipping from a mug with full attention?

### On the Road

The speaker from the Spirit Rock discussion group uses *mala* (prayer) beads when he has long stretches of driving to do. He finds the steady touch of each bead combined with a mantra to be a sound support, and his driving time has become practice time.

One of my favorite "car mindfulness" tools comes from Ram Dass. Long ago he spoke of a bell he kept hanging from his dashboard. My own bell jangles often, and while I may come back to the present moment on only every fifth ring, this is more often than I'd return without it. Somehow the bell is also a kind of formal symbol of an aspiration I have to spend more moments wakefully.

Please join in with the ways you bring daily chores and activities into the realm of the sacred. You can send your contributions to: Paduma (Jeannie Bendik), 7117 Marsh Way, Cotati, CA 94931, or [Jmbendik@aol.com](mailto:Jmbendik@aol.com). ♥

*Jeanne Bendik is a member of the Sanghapala Foundation board of directors and lives in Cotati, California.*

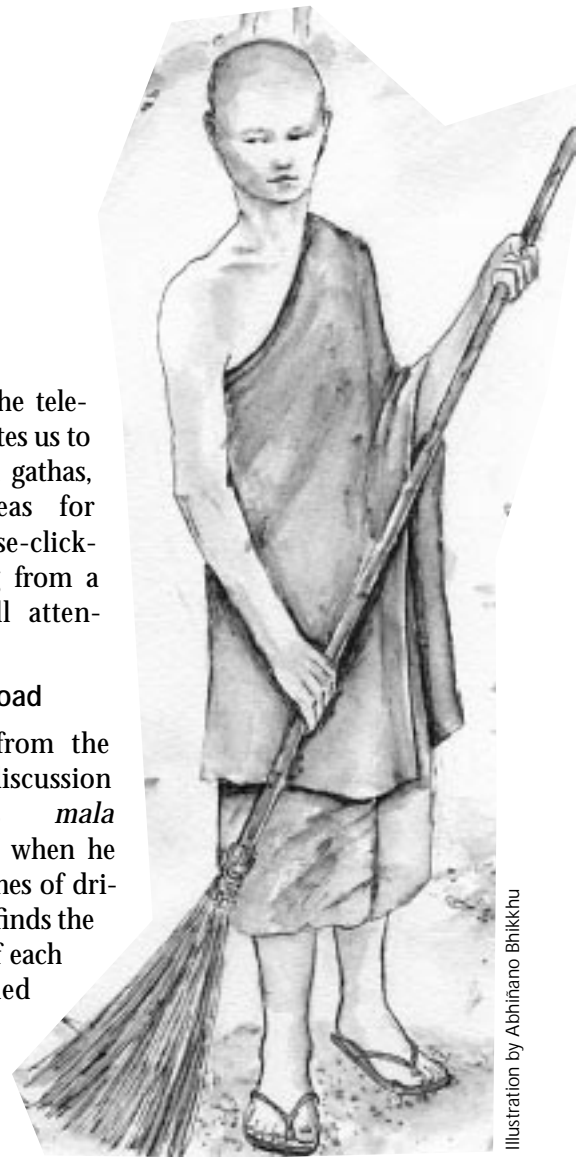


Illustration by Abhinano Bhikkhu

## Glad Tidings We Bring, or Building Committee News

by Peter Mayland, Chairman

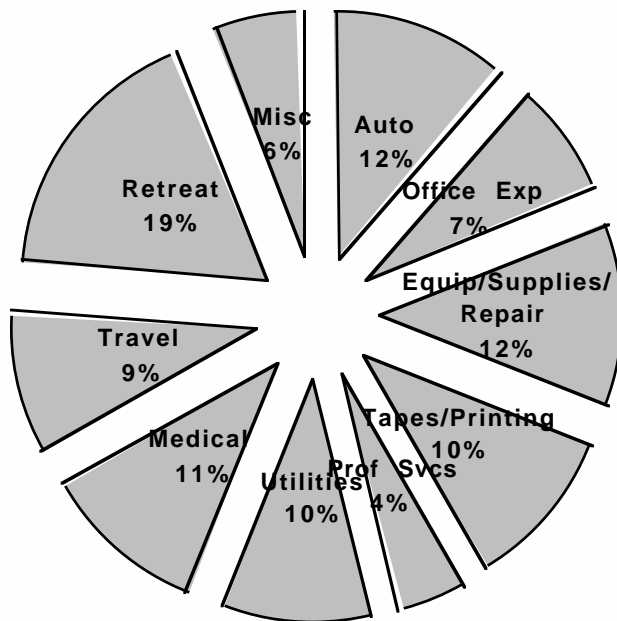
It was noted at the October board meeting that as we wind up our second building season, we are, in fact, only 15 months or so from having first moved earth to our present status. It is literally visually striking to see how much has been accomplished.

All of the projects previously spoken of are either now or very soon to be completed. Roads, retaining walls, parking, and the infrastructure for gas, electric, water, telephones, etc., are in place; and, although not terribly visible now, it was all both expensive and time consuming to accomplish. The Dhamma Hall has been strengthened and expanded considerably. The existing kutis have been brought up to code. There is a brand-new, well-constructed, free-standing women's shower and toilet building. A strategic culvert has been set and the lands around it contoured, vastly improving the space around the Dhamma Hall. We are in the process of completing the first experimental straw-bale kuti and a two-room guest accommodation. A good water system, with excellent quality water, will hopefully soon be on line. A donated sauna will soon be fired up.

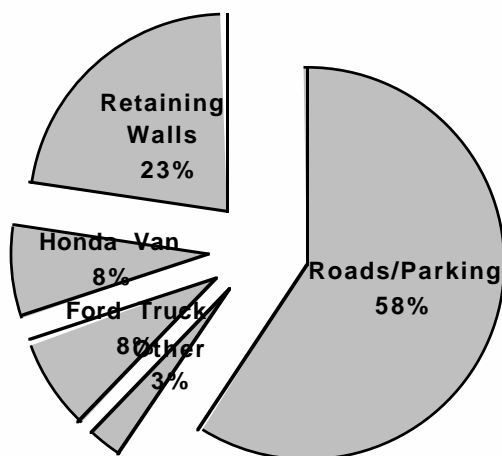
With this progress, the end of Phase One of our building program is in sight. Next year we hope to build three more kutis; our ability to train new monks is dependent upon the availability of more male monastic housing. Additionally, we would like to build a three-person women's guest house. Our big hope for the building season of 2001 is to complete Phase One with the construction of the monks' office building and disabled accommodation, at 1,200 square feet our largest undertaking to date.

In general, it seems fair to say that we have done nicely so far and that the process couldn't really be moving any more quickly. The quality of the work has been very good, and we have gotten good value for our money. A big thanks to all who have contributed in their many different ways. Please send us good wishes for the next building season. 🙏

Operating Expenses - 1999 (\$63,335)



Construction Projects - 1999 (\$332,000)





## Annual Financial Report *by Larry Restel, Treasurer*

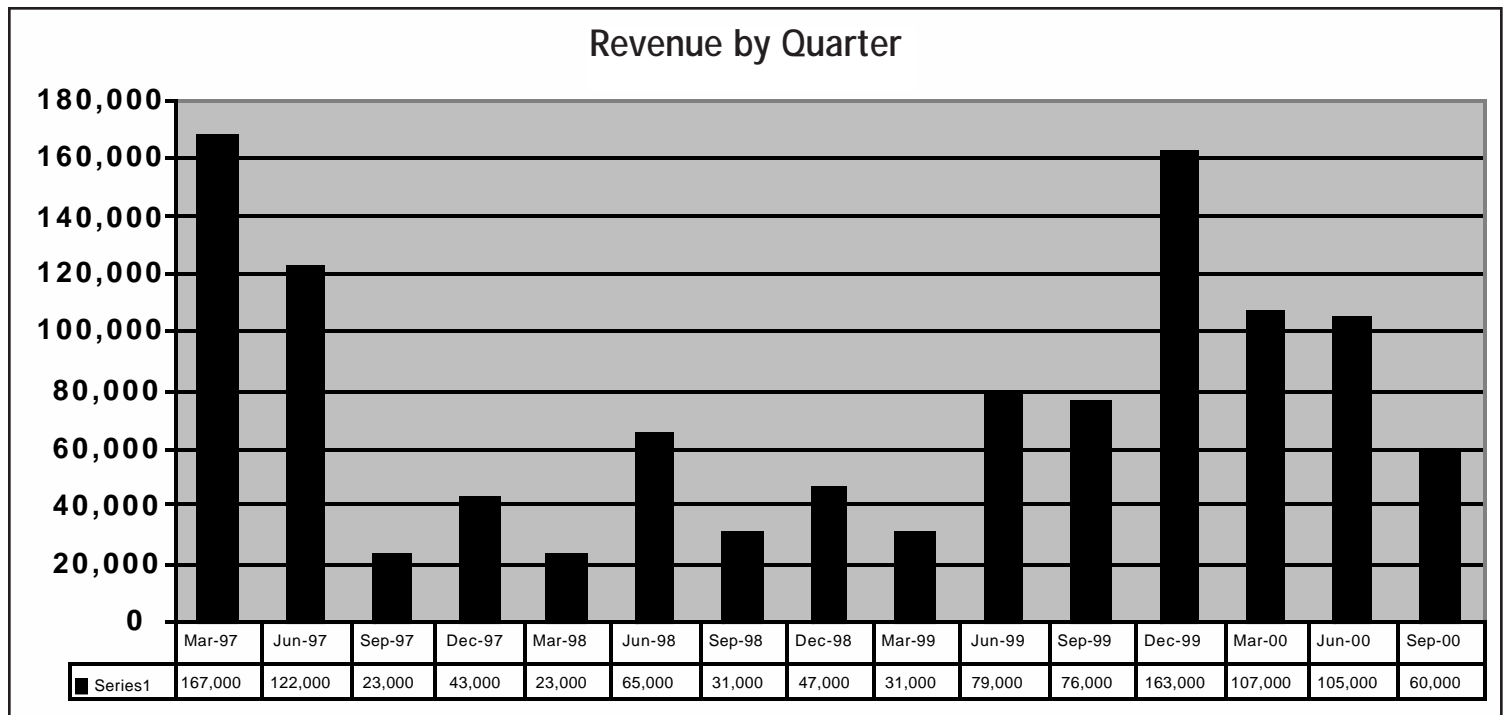
The board of directors of Sanghapala Foundation, as the financial steward, is responsible to care for the longevity of Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery in three areas: 1) fiduciary care, 2) long-range planning, and 3) managing the flow of funds. The board meets about every two months with the monastic community to assist in carrying out these responsibilities. Much of the focus for 1999 and 2000 has been on the change-of-use permit and the subsequent building projects to bring existing structures up to code; to build new roads, retaining walls, parking lots, culverts, septic tanks, leach field, water system, and women's bathhouse; and to purchase a 1999 Honda Odyssey van and 1999 Ford F250 truck. (The chart below shows only the 1999 projects.)

All projects are accomplished with freewill donations of money, time, and energy. Abhayagiri does not fundraise or generate income through sales or services. All teachings, accommodations, food, books, and retreats are offered freely. Donations come from a broad geographical base, ranging from coast to coast and internationally. Of course, several supporters donate relatively large sums of money. But it is interesting to note that the sum of all donations under \$1,000 is enough to cover the annual operating expenses for the monastery. With the median donation being \$75, it is clear that small dollar donations make a big difference; they are what keep the monastery running. (Revenue spikes shown below for Mar-97 and Dec-99 were both in response to capital needs for

the purchase of the existing house and land and new building projects respectively.) Supporters may earmark donations to be used for a specific purpose; unrestricted donations are used for operating expenses and building projects as needed.

The "Operating Expenses" chart shows the breakdown of expenditures for 1999. Like other nonprofit organizations, Abhayagiri needs telephones and computers to communicate with the ever-expanding Dhamma world. Likewise, it needs liability and medical insurance. But it is important to note that there are no salaries paid. All administrative duties are carried out by volunteers in the monastic and lay communities. Retreat expenses are covered by dana. Most construction is done by contractors since buildings must meet code requirements, but the monastic community also puts a great deal of time and energy into construction projects when it is useful. For instance, together with lay supporters, monastics have been very effective in lowering costs in the building of the straw-bale and two-room guest kutis.

Sufficient funds are held in reserve to maintain operations comfortably. Donations received in excess of operating needs are used for our many building projects and capital needs. Sanghapala Foundation has a policy not to speculate with investments, so all funds beyond immediate needs are kept in money market accounts. In summary, Abhayagiri is financially healthy. ♡



# Sandwich Retreat

by *Iris Landsberg and Cindy Hoffman*

A small but determined contingent from our “Monday Night Sangha” in Caspar, California, decided to take the dive into a daily Dhamma practice with the support of fellow travelers on the path. What began as a brainstorming session on how to better utilize the nearby Three Jewels Dhamma Hall developed into an exciting and thoughtful discussion of how to deepen our practice of Dhamma in daily life. The idea of a “sandwich” retreat sprouted.

The hot house for this idea was our core group of 15 to 25 people. We practice in many different traditions and no traditions. Some of us have teachers and some don't. There are those who have a daily meditation practice and those who don't. But every Monday night we transform Caspar Childrens' Garden preschool into a meditation hall.

So, you might be wondering, “What is this sandwich retreat?” A sandwich retreat brackets the day with Dhamma. It is a group of people coming together twice daily, morning and evening, for meditation and discussion: the “bread.” The discussion centers around a topic we have chosen to be mindful of during each day's life activities: the “filling.” Through such a retreat, we sought a direct experience of the teachings in our daily lives.

For those of you who are interested in creating a sandwich retreat, here is our recipe for this delectable dish:

## Ingredients

- \* People, preferably those with knowledge of the Dhamma who have been practicing for a while in any of the Buddhist traditions (our group had 9 people)
- \* Commitment by each participant to attend all sessions
- \* A place to meet
- \* A topic for practice (our group chose Right Speech)
- \* Half-day meditation/mindfulness retreat and discussion to set the intention and format for the next four days

## Instructions

We began with a half day of mindfulness. Periods of sitting, walking, then sitting were followed by a discussion to establish the intention and format for the next four days of our retreat. We each had a “talking stick” to indicate when we wanted to speak. (This was especially useful in providing an entrée for shy people into the discussion.) We established the guideline that after one person spoke, the next person paused a moment before jumping into the conversation.

A consensual decision set us off on the beginning of a sojourn into Right Speech. Once we decided, however, we

realized that this may be too big a mouthful to chew all at once, so we diced Right Speech into bite-sized components. Some of these turned out to be: listening, gossiping, lying, truthfulness with kindness, body language, comparing/judging, minimizing/exaggerating, fixed views, defensiveness, discernment, idle chatter, self aggrandizing/deprecating, and compassion. We wrote each aspect on a small, wonton-sized slip of paper. Folding each with care, we placed them on a zafu bed in the center of our circle. On each day of our retreat, we would choose a new slip of paper as the topic for that day. The smorgasbord of folded papers was tempting curiosity, but no one chose to indulge until the next morning when our first full day would begin.

As a group, we also spent time looking at our schedules to come up with a plan in which everyone could fully participate. This meant meeting each morning from 6:30 to 8:00 and again in the evening from 6:00 to 8:00. Each session began and ended with a half-hour meditation. This schedule would allow us enough time to share and discuss the realizations and difficulties of applying Right Speech in our everyday lives.

As the week unfolded, the universe provided each of us with ample opportunities to practice. We encountered people and situations that allowed us to confront the deeply ingrained, often unskillful habits of a lifetime. The daily practice of Right Speech allowed us to look at and feel our edges and how painful being stuck in habitual reactions can be, aka “dukkha.” Each retreatant's understanding was enriched by having access to other people's experiences.

This sandwich retreat allowed us a chance to practice deeply and to share our intimate daily insights with one another in a safe and sacred environment. We were often baked, stewed, fried, boiled, sautéed, toasted, burned, smoked, and roasted by the events of each day, but by focusing on the precious teachings, we had the chance to cool off a little. Purposely choosing to practice the elements of Right Speech felt courageous and exhilarating because it required us to bump up against and clearly see our preconceptions, expectations, and assumptions. The practice of Right Speech became the path to the present moment.

By the end of the week, all of us agreed that our experience was no less than profound.

May this recipe inspire the exploration of Dhamma.  
*Bon appétit.* 🍷

*Iris Landsberg has been practicing for 2-1/2 years and joyfully became an Upasika one year ago. Cindy Hoffman has been practicing since 1990. She is founder of Three Jewels Dhamma Hall, which is an addition to her home.*

# UPASIKA PROGRAM

## Dusty, Sweaty . . . and Cheerful

by *Annella Dalrymple*

When we Upasikas received the almost pleading invitation to work on the physical aspect of the monastery as part of our October Upasika Day gathering, I felt eager, in fact joyful, anticipation. Not only would I get a chance to see more of this beautiful yet somewhat mysterious place, but I would get to spend time with both laypeople and monastics in a more “ordinary” mode. Perhaps most important would be the chance to practice mindfulness with a community of other practitioners while doing work.

It has always seemed to me far more challenging to be mindful off the meditation cushion, to even remember to practice in the midst of everyday chores and occupations. Yet I know the necessity of such practice if there is to be any chance of awakening in this very life. Besides, since so much of my daily life is “head” or emotional work, physical work—painting, chopping, pounding—holds the added appeal of almost play. Unlike physical work at home, someone else would be carrying the burden of planning and organization. Useful exercise in a beautiful setting with my mate and among fellow travelers—what a treat! As it turned out, the day encompassed all this and more.

To begin my shift, I rode up the mountain in the back of the pickup like a member of a hard-hat crew. I was met by awesome views and warm smiles. We finally stopped on a high ridge at the end of the road. Someone had cleared a path through the thick manzanita surrounding the newly installed “gypsy caravan.” This would be a guest kuti, we were told, and our job was to make paths safe for walking meditation practice and to build a 20-foot bridge over the soon-to-be-running winter creek.

Picking a shovel and ax from the bank of tools, I set off down the dangerously stump-laden path, a bit apart from the others. Based on past experience with practicing presence in a flurry of human activity, I feared more failure than success unless I went off alone. However, I soon realized that this day and setting were different. In spite of saws, hammers, necessary instructions, and communications between workers, it was quiet—no loud radios, swearing (my dad was a builder), or frenetic sense of hurry. It became easy to bring attention into my body (and indeed necessary in



Photo by Sudanto Bhikkhu

Upasika Malu Roldan practices painting meditation.

order to avoid injury) as I swung the ax. Seeing the stumps as hazards for a monk doing late-night walking practice with only a candle to guide him, I came back again to the body breathing, muscles moving, back bending, sensing the ax as an extension of body: chop, hack, pry until the roots were freed. The thought flashed, “I’m practicing so someone else can practice.” Suddenly I understood the chain of relationships—and it does seem like a chain—from Thailand to Redwood Valley, from monastic practice to lay practice. I sensed in a new way what it means to support Abhayagiri and how it supports all of us.

Looking back on the Upasika work day now, I’m grateful for other aspects of this experience, like the chance to get to know each other in a work context, including seeing the monks all dusty and sweaty yet still cheerful. The reverberations of the day continue as I find myself more present while doing household chores and Robert scratches his inevitable poison oak. May the occasion for work practice with the Sangha arise again soon! ♥

*Annella Dalrymple is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Sonoma County, California.*

into our hands before we can eat it. We don't listen to music, have any radios, listen to the news, watch TV, read novels. We don't play sports, do crossword puzzles, garden. Basically, you ain't got nothin' except your mind and the great outdoors. We live communally; everything is shared. We don't have our own choice about whom we work with or how we work. We have no choice about the menu; the cooks cook what they want to cook with whatever shows up in the larder. We can't just pop into town to do some shopping or take in a movie. We don't have our own space. Sometimes in the winter time we get cold and wet, and there isn't a way to get as warm as we'd like to be.

Maybe I'm painting a bit of a rough picture, since at times it is also very pleasant. But what I'm really trying to say is that when you start to shed the familiar props, you get life in the raw. You experience the whole battery of loves and hates, of self concern, of the amount of things we need to have to make ourselves feel good. It's like a junkie. As long as you have a good supply of clean stuff, everything is fine, but as soon as the supply starts to dry up, things get really hairy. Anyone who has been addicted—to cigarettes, food, affection, heroin, whatever—knows what that is like. When the props aren't there, we realize how dependent our life has become. By seeing this and processing it in a deep and clear way, we can understand it. Then we are more able not to be dragged around.

There was a very sweet incident that happened a number of years ago with the first nun in our community in England. She was a middle aged woman, had been married, had had quite a sophisticated life. A women's magazine came to do a feature on the nuns, and they were interviewing her. They said, "It must be terribly difficult for you: sleeping on the floor, having one meal a day, getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning, being told what to do by all these young whipper-snappers.

"Oh," she replied, "that's easy, a piece of cake. Really. At first, I thought it would be very difficult for a woman of a certain age to adjust to all these hardships, but that's nothing. The really difficult thing is to give up your own opinions. That's the hardship. When you *know*—not just think, but know—that you are right about the way to cook courgettes but have to watch someone doing otherwise and swallow it, then things get really interesting."

The interviewer was really shocked, but it was very insightful of the nun. She realized that she was far more attached to her ideas of right and wrong, good and bad. "I think things should be this way." "Monks shouldn't talk like that." "This is what Buddhism is, and this is what it isn't." She would get really upset because Ajahn Sumedho wouldn't quote the Buddha's discourses in his Dhamma talks but would use his own language and reflect from his own experience. She'd say, "We are Buddhists. We should be quoting the Buddha!" If we don't meet them and know them, we are dragged around by our preferences, our loves and hates, rights

and wrongs. As long as things go smoothly, we can be dragged around quite happily because we think this is just life. But as soon as our plans are frustrated, as soon as we meet with a situation that doesn't go the way we like, then we lose it. We get lost. We die. There's a beautiful passage in the Dhammapada where the Buddha says, "Mindfulness is the path to the Deathless, Heedlessness is the path to death. The mindful never die, the heedless are as if dead already."

In the monastery, we learn to deal with the body, with pain. Living communally, we learn a lot about forgiveness, commitment, honesty, patience. We learn how to deal with anger, jealousy, fearfulness, selfishness. We get the whole palate; every color is there. If you can't deal with them, you don't survive. The effort within the monastic life is to know life as you experience it, as you feel it in a complete and deep way. In the monastery, you learn to understand how the feelings of love and hate, success and failure, praise and criticism all function. You learn to find that space that holds it, that knows it, and that can be with it and be still within all that occurs.

Coming to the monastery as a lay person and participating in that life, plugging into that environment, can help you carry that learning back with you, and you can begin to experience the whole firmament of your daily life or your family life even while surrounded by people who are not resolute on a spiritual practice. After all, most people are caught up in the rat race and not intent on the realization of ultimate truth. What the monastery provides in the world is a reminder that everything is okay, that we can live with whatever is happening, that we can ride the wave. For those who live outside the monastic sphere,

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our effort is to provide an alternative to the drivenness of the world. Even though you might be driving the car to work, holding down a job, looking after your aging parents, feeding your kids, or being with a loved one who is dying, it doesn't have to be frantic. It doesn't have to be obsessive. It doesn't have to be burdensome. There is a manner in which we can relate to even the most impactful and potent, emotionally charged issues of life whereby they are held, they are understood, they are fully experienced, and they are not confusing. So real life then has to do with a mind full of life, an acceptance and appreciation of life, and the monastery is endeavoring to give us a sense of this real life.♥

*Ajahn Amaro is co-abbot of Abhayagiri. Adapted from a talk given on August 3, 1998, in Caspar, California.*

# FROM THE MONASTERY

Photo by Roger Foote



(continued from page 14)

The festival essentially began many months ago when the three main sponsors—Khamala Armstrong, Triya Cohen, and Rumpai Vichitsorasatr—asked if they might offer the Kathina this year. The search for suitable white cotton cloth began, and travel plans were made. At the monastery many days in advance, the clearing up of residual building materials and piles of sundry odds and ends began, the house was painted, and plans were hatched for creating sunshades, seating, etc., etc., for the day's guests. The Sunday morning bloomed cool and bright like an alpine flower, and the bustle of final preparations began. Folks came from as far afield as Canada, Thailand, Los Angeles, the Sierras, and Oregon to participate in the event; particularly significant among these were Khun Ploen Petchkue and Khun Ladawan Paovibul, who brought with them the offerings of Khun Vanee Lamsam, Khun Rumpai, and of the many friends and supporters of Abhayagiri in Thailand.

The day flowed easily and beautifully along. After the cloth and the mountain of gifts around the tree—leafed now with greenery bearing the eye in the pyramid—had been offered to the monastic community, the monks whisked the cloth away and began the marking, cutting, sewing, and dying process in order that the completed robe could be presented to the monk chosen as the recipient of



Sewing the Kathina robe

Photo by Mary Reinhard

this year's offering. For the first time I was honored and blessed to be offered the robe, and I now wear it with a great sense of humility and joy. Contrary to the informal tradition of wonky lines of stitching and skewed corners that can come with such a high-speed job, the sewing job was perfectly executed; added to which Tan Acalo—Abhayagiri's Master of Color in all domains—adjusted the over-darkened dye job the next day to arrive at an appropriately rich chestnut gleam.

Along with all that was received we were also pleased to be able to give some things away: a new edition of *Bodhinyana*—the first book of Ajahn Chah's talks in English, originally published in 1979; a book in Thai by Ajahn Pasanno called *Lim Roht Yu Nai Jai*, meaning "Feel It in Your Heart," being the interview with him about Jay Siripong who was executed in San Quentin in 1999, and a talk about Abhayagiri Monastery; and a duet of new booklets of Dhamma teachings by Ajahn Pasanno and myself, mostly from pieces that have appeared in previous issues of *Fearless Mountain*. Many copies of these were made available for people to take that day, and it was good to see the table needing to be restocked several times. The energies and talents of Tina Tunyong, Ploen Petchkue, and Dennis Crean were mostly responsible for the initiation and production of these volumes, and we express our gratitude for their skill and generosity in doing such a fine job to make the Dhamma of words available.

That day was one of great blessings at the monastery, but we have also been called out during the summer months to many other locations to bring the goodwill of the Sangha and to invoke the power of the Triple Gem to guard, protect, and bless. Amongst these have been included an area of retreat land up near Round Valley, an amphitheater in Gualala, a psychotherapy office in Santa Rosa, a horse ranch in Redwood Valley, a restaurant in Rohnert Park, and a plain ol' house in Fort Bragg. The hunger for the ritual of recitation of spiritual teachings in the environment in which one lives and works, and for the conscious good intent of one's mentors to be spread somehow through the area, seems to be an archetypal force. It has been astonishing how, in the midst of such a huge variety of different groups of people of widely differing dispositions and experience, there has hardly been any need for explanation or qualification. The heart understands—the thinking, rational mind seems to follow meekly after, sometimes curious for a little explanation, sometimes happy to swim in the mystery of it all.

Another ceremony that Ajahn Pasanno and I were honored and delighted to participate in was the ordination ceremony for twenty-two bhikshunis and two bhikshus at the City

considering the limitations of space, we may be able to accept one or two candidates. It is always an experiment, to find out whether the monastic life fits us and whether we fit the monastic life, but if people's hearts were without such readiness to explore, this monastery would quickly fade away.

In the coming weeks we are expecting a visit from Sister Dipankara, a highly regarded meditation teacher from Burma and one of the leading disciples of Paw Auk Sayadaw; she will be accompanied by Maureen Bodenbach, formerly an anagarika both here at Abhayagiri and in England. In December Ajahn Sundara, a well-known and much-beloved teacher and friend of many here in California, is also expected. She plans to spend the winter retreat period with us and to stay until the end of Ajahn Sumedho's visit in May.

Along with the changes in the resident community there have also been some shifts in the neighborhood population related to the monastery. On our northern border there is now a cluster of our friends renting spare rooms with one of our neighbors, and over the hill to our east the developing community at KPY (short for "Khippapañño"—Ajahn Toon, their teacher's Pali name) brings regular contact with their small group of monks and lay meditators from the Bay Area and as far away as Texas and San Diego.

## DEVELOPMENT

At the time of writing three new structures at Abhayagiri were approaching completion: our first straw-bale kuti for monks, a double kuti for lay accommodation, and a *jantaghara* (Pali for "sauna"), the generous gift of Gina Sharpe and John Fowle in New York. This latter project was initiated when John said, whilst we were sitting together in the sauna at

his home in New York state after having completed a weekend retreat, "It must be more than twenty years since you last sat in a sauna."

"Not at all," I replied. "It's quite customary for monasteries to have a sauna. They had them in the Buddha's time—for the health and well-being of the monastic community—and practically every monastery I have ever lived in has one."

Somewhat taken aback and intrigued by this piece of news, John's wheels began to turn: "If it were to come about that lay donors offered you a sauna, and they guaranteed that the monastic community wouldn't have to do the building work, and the funds offered could not be used for anything else, would it be possible for a sauna to be built this year?"

Despite such flagrant leading of the witness, I cautiously replied, "Yes, that would be possible . . ."

At breakfast the next morning, he and his wife, Gina, gleefully made the offer. Moved by their kindness and generosity, I responded, "Thank you very much. I'll have to consult with the Sangha before accepting, but I suspect that everyone will be very happy with the idea." And so they were.

All three of these new buildings are about to be stuccoed and should be ready for occupancy by the time you read this newsletter. In the background to these efforts, our relations with the County, and particularly to its crew of building inspectors, have improved enormously. Gone are the days of red-tagging and frayed nerves. Their visits are still regular, but they are "very happy" with the quality of work and, it seems, have come around to the understanding that we wish to be compliant to the Rule. A mutual respect is emerging and a sense of relief is in the air—we can all breathe out now. Having said that, some of their requirements have seemed a little esoteric (e.g., Why should the sauna need to be wheelchair accessible when anyone in a chair in there would, in no short time, be blessed with second- or third-degree burns?), however we now realize that some items are unnegotiable and the only response is, "How high, and where should we land?"

It has also been striking, as it was last year, how close and respectful friendships have grown up between the Sangha and various of the contractors. Many of the contractors truly enjoy working here, both in teaming up with monks in the daily work, and in the casual interactions that flow through each day. It's not uncommon for one or two of them to join us for the meal offering—occasions which are both a treat for them in terms of the unpredictable variety of food, the chanting, and the silence, and a treat for us in being able to welcome in folks who would otherwise be unlikely to pass through our doors, yet when they do so, find themselves in a place in which they delight.

*(continued on page 13)*



Straw-bale kuti under construction